

# DGH

DEUTSCHE  
GESELLSCHAFT  
FÜR  
HUMAN-  
ÖKOLOGIE

## A College of the Atlantic for Europe

*The College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, USA, is a model for those who would like to introduce a study program of Human Ecology in Germany. Encouraged by the president of the College of the Atlantic, we sketch the concept for a new and unique college in Europe, aligned with a call for action.*

Wolfgang H. Serbser, Jadranka Mrzljak

### A Liberal Arts College for Germany

Today, colleges and universities in Germany are facing enormous challenges, tasks, and overall structural changes. This can only be compared with historical events such as the introduction of Humboldt's educational reforms in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The changes within the organization and content of study programs at universities and schools in Europe, especially the adoption of the Bachelor and Master programs, enhance the mobility and flexibility of students within the European Union. Some students feel more constrained under the new system, and unchallenged with gaining new knowledge and using the knowledge they have achieved already. Although they are in the minority, these students are primarily seeking a more diverse and free study environment to provide greater possibilities for developing their individual talents, interests, and skills. In Germany, public universities can no longer satisfy the demands of these students. What is missing in Germany is a system of small, private colleges similar to the liberal arts colleges in other countries. On the one hand, these colleges would offer a greater variety of programs, subjects, and courses, but on the other hand they would also boost competition within the German educational system.

### Studying Sustainable Development in Action

Global dimensions characterize the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Next to the major chal-

lenge, climate change, it is also important to counter the non-sustainable use of natural resources – namely air, water, soil, and biotic resources – with new methods of conservation and sustainability practices. Therefore, the first thing to focus on would be to offer an innovative, experimental, but also deliberate environment to the new generation of students, for developing their talents and interests. Instead of reciting the old and familiar, the discovery of the unknown should clearly have priority. Rather than working off stocks of knowledge, students should be supplied with a flexible study environment, which can easily adjust study contents, faculty, and procedures concurrently to meet the changing needs of students. Although there already are some private universities in Germany, there is no specific, purposeful approach toward dealing with the ecological challenges. This approach should be based upon bridging the disciplines of human and natural sciences, which would affect current educational methods and research. The *Eco League*<sup>1</sup>, a network of American colleges, is a good example to show that it is possible to build that bridge as an operating platform for young people's needs, but also to establish it as a carrier for sustainability practice. Led by the College of the Atlantic<sup>2</sup>, this group exemplifies the achievements of a university, which has

committed its study program to sustainable development.

### The College of the Atlantic

The College of the Atlantic, founded in 1969, has a current capacity of 275 students in degree programs, namely, the Bachelor of Arts or Master of Philosophy in human ecology. It follows a tradition of nearly 80 years in human ecology, which began in 1930 at the University of Chicago and which was also the origin of empirical, interdisciplinary studies. The programs of the College of the Atlantic concentrate on projects, the shape of which is largely determined by the talents and skills of participating students. There are two mandatory seminars in the first year, introducing the thinking, research, and learning model of human ecology. All further seminars or study content are selected by the students, whose progress is accompanied and overseen by mentors supporting them on their journey through the 40 disciplines and subjects represented at the college. Every sem-

**Contact authors:** Dr. Wolfgang Serbser |  
E-Mail: wolfgang.serbser@alumni.tu-berlin.de  
Dr. Jadranka Mrzljak | E-Mail: mrzljak@web.de  
[www.coa-europe.eu](http://www.coa-europe.eu)

**Contact DGH:** Dr. Angela Franz-Balsen |  
Institut für Umweltkommunikation (INFU) |  
Universität Lüneburg | D-21332 Lüneburg |  
Tel.: +49 4131 6772942 | Fax: +49 4131 6772819 |  
E-Mail: franz-balsen@uni-lueneburg.de |  
[www.dg-humanoekologie.de](http://www.dg-humanoekologie.de)

<sup>1</sup> [www.ecoleague.org](http://www.ecoleague.org)

<sup>2</sup> [www.coa.edu](http://www.coa.edu)

inar has a maximum of twelve students. Study is project-oriented, allowing students to develop and alter their projects and study plans step-by-step all the way to graduation. Accordingly, there are various topics and subjects to choose from, but all of these are connected or relate to specific local issues, inhabitants, or problems in the region; at the same time, topics can overlap. The College of the Atlantic is a special institution, which, not least because of its regional inter- and correlations, and structure, makes strong impression on the country through its ventures and unique research content. From Bar Harbor, located on Mount Desert Island in Maine, the college cooperates not only with the nearby Acadia National Park (one of the oldest national parks in the US) or the regional water resource management facilities of the neighboring counties, but also invests in extensive maritime and coast-related fields of research (for example modern studies on whales began here), as well as aspects of tourist, museum, and exhibition management, or procedural matters in planning and participation. Not only do science and research follow the principles of sustainable development, but also the organization of the college itself. The College of the Atlantic was the first campus to be honored with the Zero Waste Graduation in 2005. Ultimately, the professional success of the graduates is what speaks for the concept. Of course, this is also a matter of financing. At the moment annual tuition and fees amount to roughly USD 28 000, and the costs for student housing and board add up to another USD 8 000 per annum. At the same time, however, the American grant program supports about 70 percent of the students with financial aid.

### The Need of a Similar University in Germany

Over the last ten years several private colleges were established in Germany<sup>3</sup>. Most of them are sponsored directly by companies or corporations with powerful inter-

ests in economic matters and appropriately tailored education. Up to now, however, no college like the College of the Atlantic has been established within the German-speaking countries or Europe. This call is intended to fill that gap. We propose to constitute a private college modeled on the College of the Atlantic. For this reason appropriate concepts for scientific work, study, organization and administration, locality, region, as well as finance and scholarship management need to be established vis-à-vis present socioeconomic conditions in Germany and Europe.

### Organization and Administration

The conception of the college includes a step-wise development. In this respect, the German Society for Human Ecology not only represents a network from which a significant part of the faculty could be drawn, but could also serve as an institutional committee securing the quality of teaching and research at the college. There will be a scientific advisory board elected from this network, attending the college throughout Europe. If the first step of establishing the college as a local European branch of the College of the Atlantic succeeds, parts of the administration could initially remain in the United States. In this way, the college could pace its growth appropriately, gradually becoming independent in Germany and Europe. Presently, the most pressing matter is to find the best location for the various segments of the organization and administration, especially as financial issues take on increasing import in this process.

### Financing and Grants

Developing an adequate financing model for a private university in Germany is one of the prior tasks. Compared with the United States or other Anglo-Saxon countries, the German grant and scholarship or stipend system needs to be re-constructed on

*This is an invitation to take part in the new study group of the German Society for Human Ecology, “College of Liberal Arts and Human Ecology”.*

various levels. It is important that sponsors be motivated and made supporting partners in all of the planned projects and various proposals. The College of the Atlantic would be the reference point for getting started, even if the basic conditions in the US vary from those in Europe. Experience gathered over the years with the American model of financing private colleges and universities allow us to estimate with a relatively high degree of accuracy the amount necessary to establish a solid financial basis for this cross-Atlantic endeavor. The College of the Atlantic offers us a plethora of experience with fundraising and cooperating with supporting groups and individuals, which would be useful to us in building up and developing a College of the Atlantic for Europe.

### Region and Location

The location for the college should be selected on the basis of existing possibilities to thematically connect research contents with the social and environmental structures of the region where it is to be sited. The *UNESCO Biospheres program* provides a good example of this. Our site selection should be guided by this example. Initial contacts have already been made.

- *The island of Rügen and the Suedost-rügen biosphere:* On a longer-term perspective, a College of the Baltic is foreseeable, which would target cooperation with other Baltic Sea countries.
- *The Spreewald biosphere in the south of Brandenburg:* This is a possible location for a proposed College of the Wet Lands.
- *The Tal der kleinen Emme in Switzerland and the Entlebuch biosphere:* This is a perfect location for a proposed College of the Alps.

### Study and Graduation Program

Focusing upon the interests and skills of the students, study and scientific proce-

<sup>3</sup> Brauns, H.-J. 2003. *Private Hochschulen in Deutschland. Eine Bestandsaufnahme*. Gutachten im Auftrag der OTA-Stiftung für berufliche Bildung. Berlin: WISO Institut für Wirtschaft & Soziales GmbH.

dures at the proposed College of Liberal Arts are designed to create a free study environment based upon the flexibility, ideas adaptability, and individual backgrounds of students and lecturers. At present, the methods of accreditation in Germany are not only very time-consuming, but also often quite counterproductive. For now, it would be very beneficial, especially in the planning and conception phase of the college, to apply the terms of study from the College of the Atlantic already accredited in the US. In the long run, this could also lead to some kind of transatlantic graduation program. We still need to determine how such a program could be introduced in Europe and the US as formally acknowledged transatlantic final study degree. Concerning content and form of the basic curriculum, the main questions are: What languages will be used officially? What role does language play in general, concerning development, discussion, practice, and other aspects? Of course, for the college in Germany, English and German would be the basic languages initially, although the question is open as to other additions and flexible practice, depending on who takes part in what program, bringing the college to life. Particularly, in the initial stages of de-

velopment, it will be helpful to recruit the college teaching staff from the network of the German Society for Human Ecology.

#### Research

Research at the proposed college will be linked closely to all other programs, ventures, and facilities. The design will be determined in detail depending on the region where the college is located. Nevertheless, some of the topical focuses will directly refer to the nucleus of human ecology. Next to emphasizing problem and practice orientation throughout the development of strategies for integrated regional sustainability management, there are further aspects of importance such as basic theoretical questions about coherences between evolutionary and social concepts, linguistic issues, methodological procedures of participation, and trans- and interdisciplinarity. In the course of this, human ecology not only takes into account interdisciplinary environmental work and research, but is also devoted generally to encouraging and supporting cross-disciplinary projects in research, science, and off-campus practice. Human ecology connects theoretical models and traditions of thought in all participating fields of human, social, and natu-

#### BOX: Vorankündigung DGH-Jahrestagung 2007

Internationale Tagung der DGH in Kooperation mit der Universität Lüneburg

*Hochschulbildung für nachhaltige  
Entwicklung – spezifische Beiträge der  
Humanökologie*

*Higher Education for Sustainable  
Development – Specific Contributions of  
Human Ecology*

10.–12. Mai 2007, Sommerhausen/Main

ral sciences, as well as engineering with their scope of application building being the bridging concepts for disciplinary cooperation as well as specific research projects leading to transdisciplinary dialogue. This dialogue, however, does not attempt to undermine the autonomy of individual disciplines. Human ecology stands for a scientific and theoretical link between the disciplines and their practical areas, considered as a problem-complex. Human ecology focuses upon the needs of a knowledge- and information-based society, and challenges the connected problems and demands, which need to be observed and processed in a scientific environment.

#### On the Way – Step-by-Step

This call is a result of a series of discussions within the German Society for Human Ecology. It is an invitation to take part in the new study group of the society, College of Liberal Arts and Human Ecology. The concept was presented at the international meeting of the Society for Human Ecology in October 2006 in Bar Harbor, and discussed with members of the board of the College of the Atlantic. This call should complement and advance a general survey of appointing and achieving a scientifically profound concept of the college for 2007. Talks with possible partners from the biosphere reservations will be undertaken. In May 2007 we will present the current development at the conference of the German Society for Human Ecology: *Higher Education for Sustainable Development* (see box).

#### MORE INFORMATION:

[www.coa-europe.eu](http://www.coa-europe.eu)



A model for a College of the Atlantic for Europe: Seminars of the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, USA, are project-orientated and attended by a maximum of twelve students.